

“Transforming Our Communities: Writing the Next Chapter of Indiana’s Story”

**A Concept Paper for the Indiana Commission
on Community Service and Volunteerism**

“Everybody has gifts and everybody has needs. When you blend the two, that’s what it takes to build a community.”

Judy O’Bannon, First Lady of Indiana

“I believe that ‘survival of the most cooperative’ will replace ‘survival of the fittest’.”

Naeemah Jackson, Manager of Art Education, Indianapolis Museum of Art¹

Purpose

The purpose of this concept paper is to assist the Indiana Commission on Community Service and Volunteerism (ICCSV) and its partners-in-service with the establishment of a framework for building capacity and enhancing civic engagement in local communities throughout the state. The content of this paper is subject to revision.

Background

Acting as a resource and consultant, the ICCSV serves as the central coordinating office for the state’s community service and volunteer sectors. Among the ICCSV’s responsibilities is the implementation and facilitation of a Unified State Plan for Service (USP). The USP provides Indiana’s public, private, and non-profit sectors with an opportunity to construct a three-year inclusive service plan for communities and citizens across the state. Yet, the USP is much more than a far-reaching government paper, it is a process by which the institutions and organizations important to civil society and communities in Indiana are convened to assess where we have been, where we are, where we want to go, and most importantly, how do we get there.

Drafted in collaboration with a wide array of businesses, volunteer centers, foundations, institutions of higher education, youth/senior service, charitable associations, local/state/federal agencies, and community- and faith-based organizations, the USP identifies three priority issue areas – citizenship, community development, and education. These priority areas contain subject categories with focuses on literacy, intergenerational development, character education, and safe/healthy communities.

The final version of the USP, which the ICCSV submitted to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), is a “working document.” The Plan appreciates the dynamic nature of Indiana’s communities and is underscored by its:

- Flexibility to change as communities evolve
- Recognition that each community is unique (i.e. assets, needs, resources, heritage, etc.)
- Respect for local citizens to be the engaged “creators” of the kinds of communities in which they desire to live, work, and raise a family

¹ Borrowed from the 2001 Annual Report published by the Peace Learning Center. Indianapolis, Indiana.

Transforming Our Communities

Where We Are: An Assessment

Over the last decade, state and local leaders in government, business, higher education, and other civic organizations have acknowledged that Indiana's economic and social future depends upon strong, viable communities. While our communities continue to keep pace with the majority of national trends, many find themselves standing at the crossroads of the twenty-first century forced to ask critical questions about their future. Chief among these questions is how do we build capacity within our communities in order that we might transform and sustain community.

Indiana enjoys a rich tradition of individuals committed to helping others. Indeed, the value of caring for our neighbors remains equally as important to Hoosiers today as it did in 1816 when Indiana became the 19th state to join the Union. Anecdotal information suggests that thousands of citizens across our state perform innumerable good works each day by contributing their time, energy, and resources to help resolve a myriad of economic and social problems.²

Serious transformation of our communities requires continual investment in both volunteers and citizens. This will require expanded opportunities for Hoosiers of all ages to serve their communities, to assume leadership responsibilities, and to develop the necessary skills of effective leaders and participants.

What Are We Going To Do and How Do We Get There?

In order for communities to succeed in the transformation process, the ICCSV will serve as a facilitator when called upon. Therefore, it will operate according to the following principles.

1. Value community transformation as a democratic process between local citizens and stakeholders.
2. Appreciate the uniqueness of each individual community, its assets, and its needs. Remember, there is no "one-size-fits-all" method.
3. Respect the decisions and approaches taken by a community.
4. Assist only when asked. When asked, adopt the role of facilitator.
5. Serve as a resource and consultant.

² Unfortunately, individuals and/or organizations in Indiana have done very little to compile, evaluate, and/or analyze volunteer and/or civic engagement activities in our communities. Furthermore, there is scant data measuring the impact of services provided by volunteers.

The ICCSV, in partnership with its statewide service partners, will:

Convene seven regional meetings/workshops.

The ICCSV will convene seven regional meetings/workshops in Evansville, Fort Wayne, Indianapolis, New Albany, South Bend, Terre Haute, and West Lafayette.

Purpose:

- Encourage communities and community leaders to begin to consider a vision for where they want their local community to be in 2016, Indiana's 200th Anniversary
- Promote a "culture of citizenship" through service-learning, the Federal Work Study Program, and other volunteer programs
- Provide a forum for community leaders to network and share their ideas and best practices
- Host training seminars on capacity building, volunteer recruitment, citizen activism, community strategic planning (Asset Based Community Development, and/or Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats Analysis – S.W.O.T.)
- Conduct technical assistance workshops on resources available from the ICCSV, state agencies, and other statewide organization; offer guidance on how to approach funding sources and apply for grants, state and federal funds

Process:

- Divide all 92 counties into seven regions.
- Extend an invitation to statewide service partners and other state agencies to participate in the meetings/workshops. Encourage them to send a representative.
- Contact county officials, mayors, civic leaders, ICCSV Commissioners, etc. at least 45 days prior to the meetings/workshops. Invite them to participate.
- Contact the media 30 days prior to the event with the date, times, and other relevant information. Schedule ICCSV staff and Commissioners to meet with local editorial boards to discuss the importance of volunteerism, civic engagement, and "Communities Building Community."
- Establish local advisory committees to assist with the planning and implementation of the day's events at each regional site.
- Service Partners should include: 2016, Indiana Association of Cities and Towns, Indiana Department of Commerce (Community Development Division), Indiana Rural Development Council, interested USP stakeholders, local organizations

Create resource materials for local communities.

The ICCSV will work with statewide and local organizations to create resource materials for local communities.

Purpose:

- Gather and disseminate information on a wide array of subjects ranging from evaluation methods to volunteer recruitment (materials should contain information about Corporation and non-Corporation programs)
- Provide a "one-stop" system for local and statewide information

Process:

- Create community information packets containing general and specific information (e.g. a contact list of local non-profit and community organizations), include program information about statewide organizations, federal and state agencies; approaches to developing connections between service partners, funding sources, and organizations.

Establish a statewide roundtable of community leaders.

The ICCSV will work with community leaders and service partners to establish a roundtable.

Purpose:

- Serve as an important link between the ICCSV, its service partners, state agencies, and local communities
- Support and collaborate on efforts to compile, evaluate, and analyze data on volunteer activities and citizen engagement
- Aid in the planning and formation of statewide programs and policies related to community development

Process:

- Identify community leaders from the seven regions to serve on the roundtable (two members from each region, plus membership from statewide organizations/agencies)
- Institute guidelines for membership, goals, and outcomes (members selected by mayors, Volunteer Action Centers, United Ways, community- and faith-based organizations, etc.)

What Does the Future Hold?

The success of our communities in the future rests upon the steps we take in the present. Strong, viable communities are dependent upon the support of active and engaged citizens. However, the vitality of Indiana's communities is not limited primarily to the state's economic and social development; community is critical to the survival of our civilization, as we know it. In his book, *The Fall of Public Man*, Richard Sennett describes the parallel between the demise of the Roman Empire and the decline of Western civilization. Sennett suggests that Rome's death was not the result of outside forces along its northern borders, but an apathetic society in which its citizens withdrew inward into their homes, thereby, ignoring their civic responsibilities to the "*res publica*" (The Republic). The result, Sennett argues, is that Romans actually contributed to the destruction of their own civilization, while the Germanic tribes simply capitalized on the empire's weakened and fragile condition.³

Each individual holds the key to our success or our demise in his or her hand.

³ Sennett, Richard. *The Fall of Public Man*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 1976.